

MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

October 18, 1973

MEMORANDUM FOR: MAX FRIEDERSDORF  
FROM: BRENT SCOWCROFT (B)  
SUBJECT: Further Reply to Congressman Hosmer  
regarding Colorado River salinity  
agreement with Mexico

Attached for your signature is a suggested further response to Congressman Craig Hosmer who sent the President his comments and suggestions regarding the recent agreement with Mexico to resolve the problem of the salinity of the Colorado River water. The letter informs him that his suggestions on construction of the desalting plant were given careful consideration during the studies of the salinity problem and describes the difficulties which they presented and the reasons why they were rejected in favor of the announced plan. The letter thanks the Congressman for making his concerns known.

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Draft Reply

Dear Craig:

We refer again to your letter of September 10 expressing concern that the installation of so large a desalting plant as that planned on the lower Colorado River will overtax the desalting industry, and suggesting that construction of the plant be spread over some 10 years and water to help meet the commitment to Mexico be obtained in the meantime in an exchange arrangement with California. These are most important points. Mr. Herbert Brownell and his Task Force gave them careful attention during their studies of the salinity problem.

In the search for water in the Colorado River that the Federal Government might use in developing a solution of the salinity problem with Mexico, the exchange arrangement with California which you describe seemed at first to offer advantages. Two major difficulties were encountered, however. First, the State of California was not in a position to make a firm offer for a water exchange. Second, estimates of cost to the Federal Government ran unacceptably high, ranging from \$80 to \$112 per acre-foot. This figure compares

The Honorable  
Craig Hosmer,  
House of Representatives,  
Washington, D.C.

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with the estimated cost of \$10 per acre-foot for water to be salvaged by lining a portion of the Coachella Canal. Consideration of the possibility of utilizing this source of water was therefore suspended. After receiving your letter, further informal soundings with California officials were made. The response was that the situation with regard to the practicality of an exchange of water had not changed.

The possibility of spreading the construction of the desalter over a period of years was also considered for the reasons you mention. Beginning in July 1974, however, the United States must bypass annually without charge to Mexico about 220,000 acre-feet of Wellton-Mohawk drainage. This will represent a loss of water to the United States. The longer the desalter is under construction, the greater the amount of water that would be lost. At best the desalter will not be operational before 1978. We did not feel we could ask the Basin States to accept greater loss than was absolutely necessary, nor call upon the country to pay the cost of replacing water that did not have to be lost.

Faced with the problem of possibly taxing the desalting industry's manufacturing capability, the Office of Saline Water has devised steps which it believes ensures success. In the first place, it

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will present plans and specifications for membrane equipment, so that possibly the electro dialysis process can be considered as well as several types of the reverse osmosis process and might be partially adopted. Second, its proposed plant will be composed of several desalting segments. It has in mind four 25 mgd segments or five 20 mgd segments. Because these segments need not all be supplied by any one manufacturer, several manufacturers may participate and their combined capability could be utilized. Recent proposals submitted for the Orange County Water District's 75 mgd plant, some or all of whose units might be membrane, strengthen the belief of the Office of Saline Water that, within the time frame of the project, the industry will be quite capable of manufacturing the equipment required.

The conclusions reached are that we should proceed as rapidly as practicable to complete construction of the desalter, and that in the meantime we can rely on water salvaged from the Coachella Canal for replacement of the additional amount of Wellton-Mohawk drainage that must be wasted after July 1974.

I thank you again for writing about these significant aspects of the proposed solution to the salinity

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problem with Mexico. If you have any further question or suggestion, please do not hesitate to bring it to our attention.

Sincerely,

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Department of State

MEMORANDUM

NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

ACTION

October 11, 1973

MEMORANDUM FOR: MAJOR GENERAL SCOWCROFT  
FROM: WILLIAM J. JORDEN *WJ*  
SUBJECT: Further Reply to Congressman Craig  
Hosmer re Colorado River salinity  
agreement with Mexico

Attached for your signature at Tab A is a memo to Max Friedersdorf transmitting a suggested further response to Congressman Craig Hosmer who wrote the President to express his concerns regarding the agreement reached with Mexico to resolve the Colorado River salinity problem. In his letter Congressman Hosmer recommended that construction of the desalting plant be spread over ten years to avoid overtaxing the desalting industry and that water to meet the commitment to Mexico be obtained in the meantime in an exchange agreement with California.

The suggested reply assures the Congressman that his points were given careful consideration by Mr. Brownell and his Task Force as they studied the problem and describes the considerations which led to their rejection (unacceptably high cost and California's inability to make a firm offer for a water exchange). The letter thanks the Congressman for making his concerns and suggestions known to us.

RECOMMENDATION:

That you sign the memo to Max Friedersdorf at Tab A forwarding the suggested reply.

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CRAIG HOSMER  
MEMBER OF CONGRESS  
CALIFORNIA

JOINT COMMITTEE ON  
ATOMIC ENERGY

INTERIOR AND INSULAR AFFAIRS

**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**  
**Washington, D.C. 20515**

September 10, 1973

The President  
The White House  
Washington, D. C. 20500

Re: U. S. / Mexico Agreement on Colo-  
rado River Salinity Problem

Dear Mr. President:

BT  
A part of the recent agreement entered into between Mexico and the United States to improve the salinity of the Colorado River as it is delivered to Mexico at the International Border calls for a \$62 million reverse osmosis desalting plant which will treat the highly saline return flows from the Wellton-Mohawk Irrigation District.

This will become the world's largest desalting plant which, when operated at 90% load factor, will produce 100 million gallons of desalted water per day, or about 101,000 acre-feet per year for blending to improve the quality of flows to Mexico.

I am concerned that the installation of this large amount of desalting capacity at one time will overtax the manufacturing capability of the desalting industry and result in its expansion in a distorted and possibly noncompetitive fashion.

To avoid this, I strongly recommend that it be planned to install this capacity in increments over a period of 10 years, more or less.

The temporary short-fall of fresh water which will result from this slow-down in building desalting capacity can be made up by diverting an appropriate quantity of Colorado River water from the allocation

The President  
Washington, D. C.  
Sept. 10, 1973  
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of the Metropolitan Water District of Los Angeles, permitting it instead to flow on to the International Boundary for blending purposes. The MWD's loss in turn can be made up by diverting additional Northern California water to Los Angeles via the Statewide Water Project. During the period of time involved, that Project will still be operating substantially below capacity and can handle the load.

The cost of balancing MWD's water account would, of course, be a Federal expense chargeable to the desalting project.

The above recommended procedure will allow various competing manufacturers of reverse osmosis systems to enlarge their manufacturing capability reasonably in relation to a normal market for their products rather than in response to the heavy one-time demand imposed by the U. S. /Mexico Agreement. It will also permit the later increments to benefit from continuing improvements in desalting technology.

Evaluation of this suggestion by appropriate government agencies is requested.

Very respectfully,



CRAIG HOSMER  
Member of Congress

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cc: Secretary of State  
Secretary of the Interior  
Gov. Ronald Reagan (Calif.)  
Gov. Jack Williams (Ariz.)  
Office of Saline Water  
Colorado River Basin MC's and Senators  
Metropolitan Water District  
Colorado River Board of California  
Arizona State Water Engineer